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By Anonymous

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A

TRUE PICTURE OF ABOLITION.

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BY

REV. PRESIDENT LORD, D. D.,

OF DARTMOUTH COLLEGE.

BOSTON:

PRESS OF THE DAILY COURIER.

1863.

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Anonymous

NOTE. — The following pages were originally printed in the Boston Courier of November 22, 1862, under the signature of "L." Previous to the late election in Connecticut, the article was circulated in pamphlet form in that State, without the knowledge of the writer. Certain inaccuracies and an important omission having occurred in that pamphlet, the proprietors of the Courier have thought best to reproduce the article; the more especially as it has attracted wide attention, and has been the subject of much discussion.

A TRUE PICTURE OF ABOLITION.

PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

To the Editor of the Boston Courier:

When an abolitionist justifies the now proclaimed policy of the Administration, he takes the ground that slavery is the cause of the war, and that either the government or slavery must be destroyed. But the government must not be destroyed. Therefore slavery must be abolished. His first fallacy consists in a begging of the question, and his second in a deceptive substitution of terms — the government for its administration.

His adversary denies the assumption that slavery is the cause of the war any more than that law is the cause of transgression, or the money of the way-laid traveller the cause of his robbery or murder. An antecedent is not necessarily and morally a cause. He affirms, on the contrary, that abolitionism is the causative antecedent of the war, and will be fatal to the government if its destructive policy be carried on. But government must be sustained, and therefore all good citizens must think, and speak, and vote, in the exercise of their constitutional freedom, so as to secure, if that be possible, a better administration of it.

This is a very considerable issue. As things now are, it is of great consequence that the people to whom the government belongs should look well into the dispute. Otherwise, they may lose their inheritance without knowing it, and reparation may be impossible. A government, like a house, is more easily demolished than rebuilt

Some of us, Mr. Editor, who hold no office, and publish no

paper, and have no intention of doing either, have, so far, a fair claim to be heard in respect to the controversy which is now going on. Besides, we have somewhat carefully studied the abolitionists, whose doctrine the present recognized agents of the people are about to carry out in their administration of affairs. We can speak advisedly.

Our method is historical, which is best adapted to the occasion. Men may speculate about slavery and its relations indefinitely, and be no wiser. The doctors of that fashion everywhere disagree as to its origin, its nature, its design, its genius and spirit, its politics, ethics and theology, its science and literature and manners. Since this war began we have read many ingenious discussions of the subject from learned jurists, statesmen, divines, but only to perceive how they have multiplied confusions. The writers have looked out from their respective different standpoints, and reasoned in evident subserviency to their different idols more numerous than Bacon has described, till they have bewildered themselves and — which is worse — the innocent but unconscious public. An epidemic mental disease is consequently settled upon us. We wait for some highly raised and concentrated solvent to digest all their respective varieties of wisdom before a panacea can be found. Then, however, the poor, afflicted patient may be beyond recovery.

Doubtless the only sufficient solvent of all our intellectual crudities is revelation. But we fear the patient is too far gone, already to bear a spirit raised so much above the natural. We must content ourselves with what is next best — history. That gives us the wisdom of God in his moral providence, and to know that may be of great consequence in default of more spiritual enlightenment.

We find that, before the era of abolition, this whole country enjoyed remarkable union, peace, and prosperity for half a century. Its general officers were chosen with reference to no sectional peculiarities, but as representatives of parties indiscrimi-

nately scattered over all the States. No considerable sectional disputes arose in the Congress, but such as grew out of natural diversities of physical condition. Tariffs, internal improvements, bounties, and the like, suggested and exhausted controversy. The heat produced was hardly more than enough to produce a healthy intellectual activity, and check the bad tendencies of appropriating majorities. So far there was but little difference between Northern and Southern politicians, in the spirit with which they contended, or the expedients which they adopted. It would have been difficult, and of little consequence, in a moral point of view, to strike a balance between them. Neither the logic of statesmen, nor the craft of politicians, could have awakened dangerous personal or sectional animosities, or disturbed constitutional relations, so long as they overstepped not the limits of expediency, and affected no moral control of the public mind. Calhoun and Webster at the head, or such men as Brooks and Sumner at the tail, could never have contended greatly to the public detriment, till the Congress let in subjects of discussion that concerned more immediately the moral government of God. That was our original mistake, which some of the fathers had foreseen with fears and warnings — the common mistake of all countries, as virtue declines — of essaying, wittingly or unwittingly, to bring together what God requires us to keep asunder — the Church and the State. Till we made that blunder the country was united, prosperous, and happy. There had been no such instance in the history of the world.

If there were, before that time, any dangerous plotters against the Government, North or South, we had no evidence of it in history. That there may have been men, on both sides, ready to take advantage of occasions to exalt themselves on the ruins of the Republic, it is not improbable, for Americans are not exceptions to the common law of selfishness and ambition. But such men could have made no figure. The Union, the Constitution and the Laws were sacred, and the country would have rejected any conspiracy against them as a healthy stomach

rejects poison. Such madness could have reached no higher than to a whiskey insurrection. We were safe and honorable till the moral balance was deranged, and the Church and State fell out of their true relations to each other and to moral government.

We were tempted, almost unconsciously, into that snare by introducing a moral element — slavery — into the reckoning of politics, and thereby brought Church and State together down to that lower level. From that time our glory has departed. Our Christianity has become secular, and our secular glory has been dimmed in having lost the reflection of a more spiritual light. We have substituted speculation for faith, and our speculative discussions have been degraded into angry wranglings. We have made God and man to exchange places. His institutes and his constitutions we have interpreted by the "higher law" of our own conceits. We have converted the sovereign lawgiver into a politician. We have discussed by our own standards, and determined by vote, how it is *best* for him to carry on his government of the world. We have inquired not what he has willed, and said, and done, but what it is expedient for him to will, and say, and do, according to a master, a party, or a school. We have popularized our creeds, measured principles by their utilities, men by their clothes, and God himself by his supposed subserviency to our ideas.

Let us observe the process: — The South is slaveholding. It is so constitutionally and legally. Slavery enters into the structure of its society; not a thing of accident, possibly not everywhere of preference, but an inheritance according to the common law of earth, — a providential order, — without which, in view of necessarily, that is, of naturally and statedly existing diversities of race, culture, and condition, the social state could not have been constituted at all, and "life, liberty, and happiness" would have been insecure to a civilized and Christian people who had just bought them at so great a price. Slavery was not, indeed, the corner-stone, but the practical condition of

the Union, the Constitution, and the Laws. Whatever disadvantages were admitted to attend it, like all other institutions administered by men, it was held to be legitimate. It had existed in the usages of nations, for the ends of social conservatism and of moral government, since Cain was stigmatized and made a fugitive and vagabond on the earth, and Ham was consigned, in one line of his descendants, to the rule of Shem and Japheth. It was common law. It was incorporated into the civil institutes of Moses. It was recognized accordingly by Christ and his Apostles. They regulated it by the just and benevolent precepts of the New Testament. They condemned all intermeddlers with it, — such as they predicted of the last days of the Christian dispensation, — as "Proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth," from whom all Christians, and especially the pastors of the flocks, should turn away. The fathers were not remarkably considerate of these things, but they were not ignorant of them. They accordingly held slavery to be exceptionable only in its abuses, and that, notwithstanding abuses, it should be left to the regulations of the States whose climate, soil, or other physical habitudes or conditions should lead them to retain it. It actually obtained, at the adoption of the Constitution, in all but a single State which had early favored the introduction of the new philosophy, and whose experience had found it to be unprofitable. Wherever it was subsequently abolished, its want of physical adaptation and its consequent inconveniences, not its essential wrongfulness, were mainly the reasons of its abolition. Against that, in an earlier period, Jonathan Edwards had protested, in vindication of moral government; and, to assert his Christian liberty, had bought a slave. Thoughtful men were not troubled by the thing itself, but only by its accidents. The philosophy of sentiment and romance had not then extensively infected the descendents of the Puritans. If excitable individuals among

them had begun to feel the *aura* of the dawning illuminism and cosmopolitism of that period, and consequently condemned slavery by that criterion, even they were not regardless of their plighted faith. They saw no justifiable remedy for the supposed evil but in such amendments of the Constitution as are provided for in that instrument itself, or in friendly constitutional legislation, or the insensible influence of providential and moral causes, that could not be reckoned or compelled beforehand. So it stood, — an integral part of the best social edifice that had ever been reared by man, and contributing, in its own constituted order, to an unexampled prosperity. So it stood, — an occasion, indeed, of many wrongs and sufferings such as are incident to earth, but also of invaluable and otherwise impossible benefits to a degraded people, thereby brought nearer to the usages of civilized life, and, in as great proportion as our own citizens, into fellowship with the church of God.

So it stood, till a generation arose that comprehended none of these living realities, that honored not the God of the fathers, and for his everlasting word of natural and revealed religion substituted a "higher law." Among them were born the abolitionists, who are now, officially supreme over the land. They were, at first, a small class of speculative enthusiasts, intoxicated by the airy pantheism of France and Germany, which had covertly breathed its spirit into the "glittering generalities" of the Declaration of Independence, and, by that instrument, insensibly infected the public mind. They were men of no mark or figure, inflated visionaries, mistaking their own fancies for another Gospel, which is not another, destitute of all practical concern for Church or State, and affecting only supposable or possible, undefined and indefinable, interests of humanity in general. But they were ambitious, insinuating, resolved, and reckless. Intent upon an imaginary universal restitution, before God's appointed time, by sweeping processes of what they called reform, without discrimination of time, place, age, sex, race, capacity, or condition, and passionately heated at evils

attending the ordained relations of social life, evils growing not out of the relations themselves, but the bad passions of our common nature — the very passions by which they were unconsciously inflamed — they affected to restore society by first destroying it, and, thenceforward, not by the renewal of individual minds according to Christianity, but by political reformations and reconstructions, according to their own speculative conceits. They aspired to a millennium not of grace, but nature; not spiritual by the power of the Holy Ghost, but Platonic, according to the impulses and sentiments of the natural mind. They put feeling in the place of conscience. They substituted a man-God for the God-man; imaginary human rights for revealed human duties; and the happiness of the creature for the glory of the Creator — a happiness consisting not in a spiritual likeness to God, as the Scripture has described, but in the multiplying of agreeable sensations, according to the baptized paganism of sophisticated schoolmen. They referred the irregularities of society to restraints unnaturally laid by the family, the state, the church, for which they substituted a more refined free love, a self-determining will, and a liberty to enjoy whatever God and nature had put into their hands. Such, at least, was the spirit and genius of the idolatry which at length embodied itself in the abolitionism of the North, developing itself however, variously, according to the different temperaments, tastes, mental and moral habits, or the associations and other accidental peculiarities of the individvals who fell into its snare.

Great errors do not obtain currency and become effect, but as they are permitted to have reference to respectable authority. Unhappily for the country, abolitionism acquired that advantage. For it was an illusion that glared, at the same time, upon the benevolent seekers and the infatuated dreamers of a common salvation, and captivated for a time, some whom it could not absolutely seduce or hopelessly destroy. It was so as when, under a similar temptation in the mother country,

some such men as Edmund Burke and Robert Hall were borne on the deceitful current of false opinions till the roar of the tumbling cataract awoke them, and they were hardly saved by springing into the eddies, or clinging to the rocks. Forgetful of the lessons of history and revelation, they were slow to believe that a wisdom which boasted such great things of a superior light and a heavenly charity, could be, after all, shallow and delusive. They sympathized, generously, or benevolently, with afflicted humanity, and the painted dream of universal emancipation which played before their excited fancies seemed a realization of what belongs only to an age in the dark, unrevealed futurity of providence, to which we have yet to pass amidst scenes more terrible than any of the antecedent revolutions through which Jesus Christ has been advancing to his throne of judgment and of glory. So here; a few like Adams and Channing, to say nothing of distinguished living men, by we know not what secret political or philosophic bias, what vein of morbid sentiment, what blurred ethical or theological vision, by words whose meaning they did not measure, by reasonings inconsistent with some of their acknowledged principles, and unworthy of their intellect and their fame, gave encouragement if not patronage to the dangerous idolatry.

Abolitionism became an institution organic and vital — body and soul — a working power, representative of a new type of moral and social wisdom, improved, comprehensive, philosophical, and destined to prevail. As its gaudy sophistry took its natural, popular effect, it assumed to be arrogant, insulting, and encroaching. It was envious at God's appointed orders — the family, the state, the church — and scrupled not to assail their blood-cemented foundations. It labelled the Constitution as a "league with death and a covenant with hell." It set up its propaganda, assembled its conventions, and sent abroad its agents. It became a subtle disputant, a cunning innovator, a daring reformer, a fiery agitator, a virulent declaimer, a malignant denouncer, an implacable persecutor. Gaining confidence as

it acquired ascendency over the simple, the curious, the fearful, the imaginative, the sentimental, the undisciplined, the passionate, it aspired to popular control and revolutionary distinction. But to that end it must become religious. It was ready for the occasion. It appealed accordingly to the moral sense now jostled from its polarity. It appealed to Scripture, now twisted by improved versions, arbitrary criticisms, and fantastic commentaries from its literal, direct, and scientific meanings, till it was made as subservient and obscure as a Delphic oracle — the very Scripture which it had before denounced as hostile to its ideas, or had disparaged as unworthy of competition with its higher law. It even clothed itself in the robes of sanctity and kept its Sabbaths. It assumed control, extensively, of the religious press. It ascended the platform and the pulpit. It figured at anniversaries. It dispensed, *ex cathedra*, the oracles of the new divinity, and imprecated the wrath of heaven upon all who refused fealty and homage. To the same end, also, it must be political. It affected the well-being of the State. It studied intrigue and finesse. It became an expert. It mastered all the chicane of wires, caucuses, and conventions. It calculated its forces. It disciplined its ranks. It found the balance of power, and then sold itself to the progressive party. The price was *the government of the country*. The object was the dissolution of the Union, and then the introduction of its New Jerusalem — a returning Messiah — a church and state Melchisedec — king and priest — impersonated in an "Independent" or a "Tribune." We have seen with what a Shylock savageness it has insisted on the bond. We have seen how tamely the constituted keeper of our liberties has consented to the sacrifice.

Such is the moral record of abolitionism, brought down to the date of the President's proclamations. It has not been sufficiently considered. It has been imperfectly understood. Hence our confusions. Wise and learned civilians have left it too much out of their reckoning of our public difficulties and

dangers, because it is moral, and therefore not on the line of their professional pursuits. But that is to be false to fact, dishonorable to history, and dangerous to the church and state. It is to heal the hurt of the daughter of the people slightly, and perpetuate controversy and war. The moral question which divides us is supreme. There can be now no sound philosophy, no comprehensive judgment where it is not so installed, and all judgment will be unjust without it. Abolitionism stands out, historically, the active, practical cause of all our troubles. Without it, other existing causes would have been of no effect. It was manifestly so when it began to figure in the halls of Congress. It has been so in all our subsequent discussions, which have filled the land with strife. It was more manifestly so in its alliance with miscalculating politicians in the Fremont campaign, and more decisively in their demonstrations at Chicago. It was so not less remarkably in its appropriation of religious men, and the conventions of equally miscalculating representatives of the churches. Many of these good and patriotic citizens, lay and clerical, meant not what they did. Their eyes were holden. We blame them not for bad intentions, but a bad mistake. On the stormy sea of politics, and in the clouds of speculation and romance, they had lost their reckoning. They were blinded by old prejudices of sect and party. They heeded not those great men who died uttering the voices of remonstrance and of warning. They perceived not that true conservatism had been obliged by the new idolatry to change its residence ; that party names were no longer significant of things ; and that our issues must be changed. They understood not that American liberty had lost its balance ; that they who should thenceforth follow its mimic watch-cry, would, without a miracle, fall into confusions, and probably open the way for a bloody despotism that would lord it over the heritage of God. They had not studied that subtle power — a power of the air — which, by its apparent subserviency, actually ruled them, and still claims to be their master. It has, indeed, its hold upon

them. It insists ruthlessly upon the bond. It will have it, for its pressure bears along the rulers of the people, and, with it, the life-blood of the Church and State, if another Daniel come not to judgment, or if Faneuil Hall introduce not an era of deliverance, and reverse the judgment of Altoona and the capital.

So we speak, for so we make good our case. Abolitionism is at fault. It is false and wrong. It destroys the ancient landmarks. It obliterates the old paths. It puts its heel on constitutional relations. It sunders what God has united, and unites what God has sundered. It would subvert the government of the country, which is of God, and "whoso resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God" — all the worse for affecting so to keep it. And it is madness, though there is a method in it. What for should we commit this wrong? What for should we violate our plighted faith? What for should we reject the dictates of religion, the usages of civilized and Christian life, the claims of humanity, the providential enlargement of superior races, and doom, as we necessarily must, an inferior, imbecile, and dependent race, which God has committed to our trust, to a condition worse than slavery — to a lingering, miserable, and hopeless death? What for should we affect to change the spots of the leopard, or the skin of the Ethiopian? What for to equalize quantities that God has made judicially unequal, for the better conservation of the sinful world, and the safer distribution of its selfish forces till its probation shall naturally end? To undertake what is impossible is absurd. To force an absurdity where such great interests are at stake, is to violate the constitution of the universe, the happiness of man, and the honor of the Creator. To do it at a cost of blood which fills the land with mourning, and of untold millions, if not of gold, yet of promises to pay it, which could be redeemed only by the bloody sweat of an abused and suffering people, is an evil passing all the powers of computation. We are bound to look at these things, not technically, not politically, not speculatively, but morally and

practically as they are. We are bound to protest against them, and against the administration of the government, if need be, for the sake of the government itself; not forcibly, but by free speech and free votes, and an appeal to Him who deals not with images but realities, and "will render to every man according to his work."

But what of the secessionists? They belong to another category. Their question is referable to a different test. One thing at a time. Yet, though abolition be wrong, secession is not therefore right. One extreme may not be held to justify another. In some morbid states of the body politic, even a natural remedy may be worse than the disease. But that is not here the question. That question take us to a different reckoning — of technical definitions, of legal subtleties, of special pleadings, of speculative theories, of political expedients, of financial calculations — a labyrinth where we are soon lost without a moral clew. We leave that to those whom it more especially concerns. We simply commend to them, not to leave out of their reckoning the moral government of God, for now the issue between the contending parties is taken up to the court of heaven. The God of battles must decide between them. Or, if there be an earthly arbiter, it is alone the people. But they are better casuists than civilians, and their judgment, after all, will be mainly determined by the moral sense. God will ultimately decide, not after the forms of law, but through the conscience of the people. Our main concern, therefore, is to keep our own hands clean, and our conscience clear. When we put ourselves right, our adversaries will be likely to correct their wrong. Then the healing, restoring influence will descend, and union, peace, and happiness again be the portion of the people, and the inheritance of their children. To persist in any wrong is vain. L.